

EGG-SHELL CHINA

BY KATE JORDAN

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TOMMY PERKINS was out of Princeton only six months, and was beginning life in a stock-broker's office. His time there was spent before a small sliding-window with brass bars, where he took in and put out insignificant, oblong slips of paper, wrote in a small hand in a big book, and kept constantly glancing up at the round clock. He was twenty-two and, as it happened, he received the exact sum of his years in dollars every Saturday afternoon. Tommy felt this to be a melancholy coincidence, and often said so, but always added that, unlike millionaires, he had "both his health and his hair."

He could have managed very well if he had not been so incurably hospitable. It was sometimes ghastly having the tastes of a prodigal on "twenty-two per." It was also a terrifying sort of impudence for him to try to rig up a counterfeit of "chambers" instead of ingloriously boarding, or having a furnished room, with meals anywhere. His men friends, who were either unimaginative economists or rich, told him so, and Tommy would reply after this fashion:

"There 's only one way I can explain my craze to get rid of cash. Although I 'm only five feet six and a tow-headed, raspberry blond, I guess I 'm the reincarnation of one of those lavish Roman emperor Johnnies who melted pearls in vinegar and all that sort of thing; for I assure you that to have my friends sitting around my own mahogany, while they watch me stir something in my own chafing-dish and touch glasses of fairly good stuff at my own expense, is the only thing that makes my life worth living. To balance this madness, for a week after a spree I fill up in places that are all white tiles and nickel, like a well-fitted bath-room, and where the juggling of dishes has the noise of a ton of coal rushing down a shaft. You can't change me. As the bad lady says in erotic fiction, 'I am—what I am.'"

Tommy did not know that this craving for his own things about him was really the home instinct in him struggling to live against the ugly and expedient. It took Clarissa Van Doorn to find this out and tell him so. We may as well start with a definite idea of Clarissa, because, although a girl of to-day, she had not even the shakiest foothold on the present scheme of things. To meet her at a romping subscription dance was like stepping from a ballet, all red light and brass band, into a Dutch garden as still as a church in a late, yellowing afternoon.

Clarissa's family was old—so very old it was a wonder that it still managed to live. It did so only in a tottering way, in the debilitated Van Doorn mansion on Stuyvesant Square to which in the thirties her grandfather had brought his bride, and which Clarissa's aunt now rented out in furnished floors to professors and Anglican clergymen. Clarissa was a stenographer, but a stenographer de luxe. She had four patrons, all wealthy society women who had been her mother's friends, and every day from ten to four she wrote their letters on thick, crested paper. It will be understood now how Clarissa, though a working-girl, went to dances where she met young men like Tommy, who, though poor, was some day to inherit the considerable fortune of his grandfather, Admiral Perkins.

The fine and ancient quality of the Van Doorns, who had been too proud to marry any but own cousins for generations, showed in Clarissa's type. She was like a faded sampler. She was like a breath of lavender that steals from a long-closed chest. She was like a tune on a spinet whose orange-colored keys have gone flat. She was like a sedate, chintzy room, with windows looking east, where nothing is ever disturbed, that every one admires, but few would presume to live in.

Tommy, from sheer amazement, had,

as he expressed it, "fallen for her" at their first meeting. The demureness of her sprigged mull dancing-gown; the sleekness of her dust-pale, parted hair; the dove-like peace in her vaguely colored eyes; the luminous delicacy of her skin all down her egg-shaped face; the bonelessness and smallness of her narrow hands, with nails of unpolished and convex perfection—all these things operated on Tommy their fairy-like spell.

When he said to her, "Shall we take a turn?" and she had answered, "I should be most pleased," he had guided her about with a religious feeling. She was so frail he held hardly anything. He found himself wondering where her digestive apparatus could possibly find room, but checked the thought as unseemly. She smelled faintly of old rose-leaves. Her breath was like musk. She kept her blue-white eyelids down. Tommy went into a dream as he danced. It was the year 1840. He was his own grandfather, wearing a stock and side-whiskers, and he was dancing with Queen Victoria when she was seventeen.

"I thank you sincerely, Mr. Perkins," he heard Clarissa say as he led her back to the aunt who kept the lodging-house de luxe. "You dance with such exquisite grace."

It was unfitting that Tommy should have given a jolt like a calf, and said to this merely, "Do I—*honest?*" But he did, and all the way home could have kicked himself. As he kept thinking, he had had his chance to register on her memory a gem like, "Oh, Miss Van Doorn, you compliment my poor efforts too effusively!" But he did n't—he *did* n't, and there was an end to it.

He began cultivating Clarissa. From the beginning his English grew purer and purer. When he knew her very well he told her of his rooms and how he had enjoyed "picking up stuff here and there" for them. It was then that she confided to him that she likewise had an adoration for furniture and old, egg-shell china. This became a bond between them. She told him she would inherit only some of the colonial, family pieces in the Stuyvesant Square house, so that in the meanwhile all her savings went on bargains at auctions. She could tell and pick sagaciously, for she had become a connoisseur.

More than that, she had hired a room in a ramshackle storage-house not far from where she lived, and in that she was slowly placing one by one her secret treasures.

It was with inward tremblings that Tommy asked her to visit him for the first time, for tea at his "diggings," one Sunday afternoon. This was after his engagement to her. How this, by the way, had come about Tommy never clearly knew. But on a holiday when she had taken him to the Metropolitan Museum, and they were sitting before Bastien-Lepage's "Jeanne d'Arc," he had told her that she was an ennobling influence in his life. Then he had seen a tear tremble on her lowered lashes, and had said:

"I love you. But I don't suppose you could love me!"

"I do," she had sighed.

"How much?"

"Oh, sincerely."

"But I 'd have a cheek to ask you to become engaged," Tommy had begun to explain. "You see, I only get twenty-two per—"

She had looked shocked. Her large, mild eyes sought his fully.

"Are you not asking me to become your wife, Mr. Perkins?" she had said, and he felt her tremble.

"What else?" Tommy had twittered with agility, conquering a feeling of stage-fright. "Only—we 'll have to wait."

"That will not be hard," Clarissa had said with meek happiness, and leaning back with a sigh of content. "It will give us a chance to collect befitting furniture and china for our home."

So on this Sunday she was coming to Tommy's "chambers" accompanied by two Van Doorn cousins. The address was really a rooming-house on lower Madison Avenue, but the "top floor front," which had formerly held the regulation iron bed, oak bureau, and so forth, had been changed into a "den." In the middle of this, at four o'clock, Tommy stood looking about while trying to pull thoughtfully at a modicum of white fuzz next to the dimpled corner of his mouth. He felt satisfied with what he and the negro house-man had done in touching up and getting tea ready. What Tommy called his "etiolated facial effect" did not extend to his mouth, of a healthy coral, which

now smiled broadly; nor to his eyes, which under the long, white lashes were surprisingly, charmingly violet, now glowing with satisfaction.

"No one could help liking this," he said to the servant. "Could they, Sam?"

"I like it, suh," Sam said, and blinked so fast in approval that only his eyeballs showed. "Nothing like color, suh, for making a room tasty."

Clarissa, in new spring finery, came with the cousins. She was like a tight, small bunch of pale-mauve primroses, and her eyes had a candle-light beaming. This was when she entered. She looked around, and the smile went out. Not suddenly. It went out in a slow, well-bred way, as light melts unimpressively into dusk. She was polite, but quiet. The quiet deepened until she was absolutely mute. Toward the close of the visit she looked distinctly sick, but this, too, in a saintly, refined way that you felt she would somehow achieve if stretched in agony in the retiring-cabin of a channel steamer.

"You don't like it," Tommy gulped to her when the cousins went into the adjoining room to look over his book of college photographs. He seemed to have half swallowed a knife.

"Oh, Pierpont, I'm so sorry!" Clarissa sighed.

This name applied to the disappointed hero must be briefly explained. All derivations seemed undignified to Clarissa, while in this case, unfortunately, the baptismal name Thomas suggested a footman to her. She had unearthed her lover's aristocratic middle name, and felt that the situation was not only saved, but improved.

"What don't you like?" Tommy asked wistfully.

"Can't you see, Pierpont, that you have not achieved a consistent picture? The place is typical of nothing—neither class, period, nor style. It is a conglomeration. One thing affronts the other."

"Don't you like the lamp?" Tommy asked in a sort of horror as he remembered what it cost him.

"In its way it's not bad," Clarissa murmured; "but it's Burmese, and its light shines on two Bristol plates—"

"I thought you liked old china?" he wailed.

"I do, but *not* in juxtaposition to a

Burmese lamp. Then, see," she continued, the color strong in her cheek in the way it came when she talked of old furniture and not at any other time, "your cups are cheap Japanese—"

"Sixty cents apiece," Tommy said resentfully.

"Pierpont,"—Clarissa made a dainty grimace, as if her teeth were on edge,— "spare me! They were turned out by the thousands in New York. The only Japanese china to be tolerated is the very ancient, at prices almost prohibitive, and of course to be used in a Japanese setting. I am only saying this," she added gently, sweetly, as her hand rested on his like a butterfly, "to help you. Now, who—*who*—suggested this excruciating wall-paper?"

"Red?" Tommy asked meekly. "Plain red? A solid color and *cheerful*."

Clarissa did not think this worth an argument.

"Let us see," she said, as she sat up straight, "just what you have gathered here. Your table is a mahogany reproduction. On it is a Mexican jar. That mirror, though it never saw France, is French in style. Your revolving-bookcase belongs in an office. *That's* a jute rug. *That's* a Dutch tankard beside that awful Bagdad portière. *That's* a Swiss clock. You have a few excellent old prints, but mixed with Spanish dancers and college photographs they are lost."

"Well, I must say I thought the whole business made rather a fetching little get-up," said Tommy, who himself now looked vague, like the faded prints, and wan, like the fragile china, which were all she had really liked. "I guess you'll have to take me in hand in earnest, Clarissa."

She did. Fervid, obsessed times began for Tommy Perkins. He gave the Burmese lamp away to a friend, whose joy at getting it seemed, in the light of his own new knowledge, a pitiful exhibition; sold the revolving-bookcase to the German landlady; kicked out the jute rug; and gave the Spanish dancers to Sam. When all was done, he seemed to himself like a room that had been disinfected after a dangerous fever. Economy made the hectic walls remain, though, for the life of him, he could not help liking that red paper. But he hoped for an eventual, full

conversion that would make him shiver at it as Clarissa did.

He watched for auctions of old furniture as the customers in the office watched the ticker. His evenings with Clarissa were spent poring over the catalogues of approaching sales. Their home was to be strictly Georgian, and in the details of this chaste period Tommy soon qualified as an expert. He talked of Adam, Hoplewhite, and Sheraton as formerly he had talked of comic-opera queens. He grew to love egg-shell china, *in its place*; little brass knobs on doors; small, square window-panes; newel-posts; high, shelf-like mantels; glazed cretonnes; Sheffield candlesticks; waxed, darkly shining floors.

He and Clarissa would meet after business hours in dingy auction-rooms, go carefully over the exhibition, pick out what they fancied, and mark opposite them their ultimate price. Afterward, one or the other would manage to attend the sale, and at times some of the things they desired went to swell the collection in Clarissa's store-room.

Now and then a mistake occurred, as, on one very rainy day, when neither had expected the other at a sale where they had marked for possible purchase a luster jug and an old Minton platter. It was unfortunate that Tommy, at the back of the crowd near the door and in a mackintosh that sounded like a wet whale, should have kept feverishly raising the bid on these items against some stubborn woman who sat far down near the dais; for afterward, when to his amazement he saw Clarissa among the home-going bidders, and said jubilantly: "I got the china. Had to bid against some creature in the front row, so paid a good bit for it," she had answered through almost shut lips: "I was the creature. Thanks to your carelessness in not telephoning me that you were coming, Pierpont, we are the poorer on this purchase by about eight dollars."

Sometimes Tommy was aware of a lonesome feeling. Sometimes, as he bent over the big account-book, writing in his small hand, he found himself wishing that there was more love and less old china in his romance. Clarissa permitted but little embracing, and the occasional touches of her lips were as cool as they were fragrant. Her delicacy and demureness continued to possess an immaterial enchant-

ment for him; but he had a human longing that sometimes she would let herself go, fling herself into his arms, and kiss him in a way to make his head spin.

The thought was blasphemy. He remembered the once that he had tried a passionate show of his affection upon her. They were in her aunt's Victorian parlor, on a horsehair sofa, and his ten-o'clock adieu was imminent. A mad impulse made him unloosen the thin, smooth plaits of her hair, give her a hungry, pulsating kiss, and burrow his cheek against the speck of throat showing above her high, whaleboned collar.

"Oh, love," Tommy murmured, his lips against her ear, "won't it be rapture when we never part—day or night?"

Clarissa told him that such conduct was "common," that such a question was degrading. A flood of gentle tears made her look a martyr, and she melted from his sight. It had taken three long letters of apology in which he had called himself many harsh names before Clarissa permitted him to be tête-à-tête with her again.

His grandfather, the retired admiral, had come from Albany for his annual spring holiday. Tommy loved the old sailor—loved the way he fought gout; his fog-horn laugh; his plain-speaking; his shock of angry white hair, fine and glistening, like spun-glass, above his pouting face, which was the color of an egg-plant. To him he brought Clarissa, and with anxiety watched the meeting. The admiral had been attentive at first, then plainly chilled, then quite as plainly bored. The next day, with glances that twisted into Tommy like a gimlet, he said some disquieting things.

"That 's a delicate bit of old china you 're thinking of appropriating, Tom."

"Clarissa would like hearing herself described that way," said Tommy. "She 's nuts on old china."

"Not easy to handle," the admiral suggested. "Not suitable for every-day use. Think it over, my boy, before you marry an egg-shell-china woman. No red-blooded man ought to. The experiment is apt to turn him into a secret devil or into a milk-and-water, sick cat of a Nancy, which is worse."

"Why, gran'-dad, you really think—"

"Answer me this!" the admiral thun-

dered, and shook his fist in Tommy's face. "Have you ever hugged that girl to death? No. I can see that by your meek and lowly face. Ever mussed her hair and tried to eat her up? No. And *you never will*. She 'll be one of the wives who 'll wear everything buttoned up to the throat and down to the wrists. I know them," said the admiral with feeling. "Don't I, though! Those saintly women were of the vintage of my youth. You 've had the bad luck to draw a survival of them. Now, *you think it over!*"

But this was the very last thing Tommy wanted to do—think. It made him uncertain and a little sad. His grandfather was right. Fate had handed him a sweet-heart who had "the tender grace of faded things." In her still lived the formal spirit of the minuet, of supper at six, candle-light and cards, and everything over by ten. How, then, could he expect her to have also the highly colored charm of the usual sort of girl who would be "crazy about him," to whom face-powder was not a misdemeanor, nor the turkey trot a crime? No, you can't have everything. So Tommy cultivated a contented spirit, and grew even critical of girls who were strikingly different from Clarissa.

The store-room was almost full by this time, and Clarissa had inherited an unexpected legacy of twenty thousand dollars from a third cousin. She made a shy suggestion to Tommy that their marriage be hurried.

"Why not about a month from Michaelmas?" asked Clarissa.

After this was explained to Tommy's deplorable low-church comprehension, he consented, and late October was decided upon.

"You see, it seems foolish, Pierpont," Clarissa added in exact explanation, "to keep paying for a place to keep our furniture when we might use it for a home."

The remark not only chilled Tommy as a lover. Its thrift seemed to tie him up in knots. He had often winced under this biting economy in Clarissa: she had put a stop to his giving parties; would never let him buy her ice-cream sodas; tabooed his providing taxi-cabs for dances, preferring to go in the subway, bundled up, and with a veil tied under her chin, so that somehow she suggested a well-dressed apple-woman. At such times she

would compute how much he had saved and urge him to lay it aside. Very good advice, excellent; yet Tommy began to feel as if he were in a gray world, walking beside a ghost who had no arms that he could feel about him, no warm lips that could be offered for his kisses.

Early in October they read of a most unique sale to be held in a house in the Thirties just off Fifth Avenue. A famous traveler had died, and his collection of South Sea curiosities was to be put up at auction.

"But I can't see how these could be mixed in with our Georgian specimens," said Tommy, delighted to "get one on" Clarissa when she suggested that they attend it.

"Only for a special place, Pierpont. In the apartment we 'll take there will probably be some little niche where you could retire when you wished to smoke—"

"Why not in the yard?" Tommy snapped with a distinct snort.

"And," Clarissa continued, placidly ignoring the ugly sound, "these weapons and shields would give it an appropriately masculine touch."

So they went. As it was a wild, wet day, the attendance was small, and Clarissa grew excited in her controlled, smoldering way at the idea that the things would go at low prices. Tommy always got nearer to her at these auctions than at any other time. Color would show in her face, and her vague, gray eyes would darken and glow. While bidding cautiously, slowly, lifting the price only by half-dollars, she would grow eerily beautiful, a sort of ladylike vampire.

By the time the sale was finished she was radiant. For ridiculously low prices they had gained an astounding collection of South Sea impedimenta: high bamboo javelins; big shields made of bark and shaped like beetles; earthen bowls painted with daubs of savage color; petticoats of stiff, rattling grasses; coats of fiber; musical instruments, against the resonant wood and stretched gut of which padded sticks sagged, so that from the slightest touch or breeze they gave out savage notes—all these were some of what they had paid for, and which were heaped in one corner of the empty parlor.

"Everything must be taken away at once," said the man who was superin-

tending the sale and who was cross at having had to accept such low bids. "Everything must be out within an hour."

"I'll just give the address to your expressman," Tommy said briskly.

"We have not supplied any expressman."

"Do you know where I can get one?"

"I do not."

"Is there a telephone?"

"There is not." And the man went away.

Tommy set his teeth, and went in search of Clarissa, who was eying the savage-looking mass with an astute speculation in the gaze.

"To find a chance expressman," said Tommy to her, tensely, "near Fifth Avenue, late on a Saturday afternoon, and the rain coming down like lines of bayonets, is just about as likely as finding safety-razors on sale in a florist's. I'll go out and get a taxi."

As he expected, he saw Clarissa's frugality turn her into a stone image.

"If we paid for a taxi-cab, we would no longer be getting these at a bargain," she said coldly.

"Well, we'll lose them altogether if we leave them here. You watch them, and I'll get a taxi—"

"A taxi would n't accommodate half of them," she objected.

"Then I'll get *two* taxis," said Tommy, wilfully.

"Pierpont!" The word was soft and shocked. "Please don't say such things."

"Other people are crowding theirs into cabs and motors. We've got to get this stuff to the storehouse. How? *You* suggest something."

Clarissa swallowed nervously. Her egg-shaped face was of a bluish pallor.

"I was about to say that we could, between us, easily carry them—"

"*Carry?*" was Tommy's limp cry.

"To the Fourth Avenue car," Clarissa continued, unmoved. "It is only two blocks away, and will leave us at Seventeenth Street, quite close to the storage-house. Though we could n't put up our umbrellas, we would n't get very wet."

Tommy was dead against it. Yet everything conspired to make him do what he detested: a feeling that they were stranded there; the boredom of further argument about expense; and the conclu-

sion that if Clarissa were willing to make this brave and money-saving effort, it was unkind, even unmanly of him to demur.

So he made ready for the dash through the rain to the car. The inhospitable superintendent could not even give them newspapers for wrappings. Naked and gleaming, the sheaf of javelins and two big musical instruments were strapped to his back. Shields were tied to his arms. And against his chest he carried a big pottery bowl piled high with the one-time grass skirts of some nose-ringed, Polynesian belle. Clarissa burdened herself with all of the smaller articles that she could carry, and so they set out.

It had been all very well to think of "dashing" to the car. The javelins and the instruments hanging down Tommy's back kept getting between his legs, while, unless he walked with the utmost nicety, the shields on each arm thumped against his knees. He had not realized his awfulness until out in the grayness of the afternoon. Fortunately, there were few people abroad, but these stopped to investigate what they could see of Tommy. They also listened to him, for with every step he made melancholy music.

"They think we're doing sandwich work!" he growled through the colored grasses at Clarissa. "I don't know why I ever consented to this. It's awful. If only those blamed tom-toms would stop playing!" He paused for rest against an area railing, and managed to wipe the streams from his face. He was enraged, and although Clarissa's calm, pensive eyes reproved him, he was keyed to defy her. "If only some empty taxi would come, I'd take it."

"The car is very near now," she said impassively; "and this is wasting time."

"On with the dance!" Tommy snapped, and began his mincing progress again. But after a few steps he stopped. His face was so bloodless she asked him if he felt faint.

"The club is on this street!" he said and choked. "I'd forgotten, and there—*look at them!*—Pete De Forest and Roger Davren and Brock Houston—*coming!*"

Tommy's club, a Fifth Avenue one, was a brand-new and beloved dignity for which the admiral paid. To say that at that moment he would have gladly van-

ished down a sewer rather than have his friends see him as he would be the simple truth. But he could not vanish anywhere. Already at a short distance from him, and before recognition, the three were eying him and Clarissa with the liveliest interest. He had to go on, and he did so with the arrowed heads of the javelins swaying above him from the back, and the painted grass prongs waving in front of him, and the musical instruments giving out with every step big, mournful *plungs* behind him.

"Perhaps they won't know us. Push that poi-bowl higher, so it hides your face!" he groaned. "I'll get lower, too, behind the grass!"

He tried this, his head averted, yet was aware that the men had to step into the gutter to make room for him and Clarissa to pass upon their bristling, reverberating way. He was also furiously aware that Clarissa, instead of avoiding their eyes, had lifted her Van Doorn chin and bowed to them imperiously. They did not speak to him. For this he inwardly thanked them and God.

Their troubles did not end at the carline. Four motormen, after open-mouthed stares at them, put on power and whizzed past. Not until Tommy stood in the middle of the tracks was he able to command attention. To enter the car he had almost to unload. Clarissa tripped against the musical instruments, and raised such a moaning that passengers asked what was the matter. The conductor looked derision. Tommy was just as wet from his pores as from the rain. So was Clarissa. Both were silent. But Tommy's speechlessness implied a flood of vituperation waiting behind a dam; and Clarissa knew it.

The ramshackle storehouse was closed. The money that might have been paid for a cab had to go to the old watchman before he grumbly admitted them. The elevator had stopped running. There was no gas in the upper part of the house. So, after a climb of six stories, and in the candle-lighted store-room crowded with the milestones of their romance, Tommy and Clarissa "had it out."

"After turning me into a South Sea Island hut on moving-day, why, when I asked you not to, did you bow to my friends?" he demanded at white heat,

while wiping his pouring face and what he could get at of neck and wrists. "Why?"

"I felt we were doing nothing reprehensible," she said calmly and smiled. "I don't think my position in society will suffer from it."

"Because you're a Van Doorn! For that reason you think you could walk up Fifth Avenue carrying a mutton-chop instead of a vanity-case, and mutton-chops would become fashionable."

She did not deny this. Leaning restfully against a Sheraton spindle-back settle, she smiled.

"I see nothing humiliating in either poverty or economy," she said in her gentle voice.

"But what about—meanness?" Tommy asked and glared.

"I don't understand," she inquired in a cold, threatening way.

"*Meanness!*" he repeated. "It was mean of you to insist on it, and for me to allow myself to be turned into a truck—an outlandish, musical truck—upon the New York streets just to save the hire of a cab that I could well afford. I'm boiling with shame. I'm sick. I feel like a bit of filth."

"Your language is unnecessarily strong," said Clarissa through almost shut lips, and made for the door.

"Everything's too strong for you," he cried, and faced her fully. "You have a refinement that's nasty."

"Don't come with me," said Clarissa, coldly.

"I won't!" Tommy blazed, and she disappeared down the dark passage.

The next day, in the neatest of bundles, his ring and letters came back. He also received a check from her which paid for his share of the collected furniture. He was very miserable. He was only twenty-two, he had not cultivated girls, and Clarissa had become a habit with him. So had ancient furniture. When Tommy realized that never again on those wet days beloved of bargain-hunters would he sit beside Clarissa at auctions and hear her bid little by little on something really good, he wanted to place his young face on the big book where his small handwriting was still wet and weep.

He was several pounds lighter when, on the next Saturday afternoon, he went

to the storehouse. He still had the key to the room, and he wanted to put back a very old Lowestoft bowl, with rose decoration, that she had loaned him, and which he felt was now rightfully hers. But the door was open a little way, and beyond it he heard a woman's sobbing. It was deep, but dainty, a perfectly refined outburst that would have been approved of by the very best families. Of course it was Clarissa.

"For me!" Tommy thought, a painful, yet ecstatic, lump forming in his throat. "Weeping for me!" He felt cozily important again.

"Clarissa," said Tommy, and put the bit of exquisite china on a card-table that was shaped like a half-moon and stacked on a fender, "can't you forgive me?"

She looked at him thoughtfully.

"Since last night I am in a sense betrothed to Nicholas Gansevoort."

"Your cousin! That anemic little curate!" Tommy gasped. "You don't love him. *Clarissa*, think it over! O darling, take me back, and I'll do anything! I'll even buy that apple savings-bank you're so keen about, and save car-fare!"

They had almost made up—*almost*. Clarissa had allowed him to take her hand when, in his eagerness, his elbow knocked against something that fell with a splintery crash. Tommy paid no attention to it. With eyes alight he tried to put his arm around her, not seeing that horror was crimping her face as she gazed over his shoulder.

"I'm hungry for you!" Tommy confided passionately.

"The Lowestoft bowl!" Clarissa gasped. "Rare specimen—rose decoration—broken!"

"Darling!" he whispered.

"The—Lowestoft—"

"Oh, to hell with the Lowestoft bowl!"

He gave a wild, gay laugh, clutched her, and held her prisoner in a stifling, devouring kiss. "My own!" Tommy murmured in a burning tone as he let her breathe.

But Clarissa did not look in the least as if she belonged in his possessive case. Panting, her skin gone drab, she was unwinding him as she would a snake.

"Leave this room, and never speak to me again!" she said in an icy, remote voice. "A man who could laugh at breaking an old Lowestoft bowl—and *curse*—and presume to kiss me in that *coarse* way, is a man I would not include even among my acquaintances!"

Tommy stood frozen. His mouth hung open. He began wrinkling his nose and winking as if he had come out of sleep to find himself all "pins and needles." Then words began to trickle from him as notes come from a clock running down:

"I guess—my grandfather was right. You're the sort—to think more of that broken egg-shell china—than of a man—and his love—and his needs, for you're egg-shell china yourself. You—why, *Clarissa*—you're not *human*!"

"Go!" she said thinly, with a pale stare.

He swayed out blindly, like a drunkard, a bit of the Lowestoft bowl sticking in his boot-sole.

He received a letter from the admiral a week or so later. This was in answer to his own, telling of the broken engagement, to which bit of news he had added that his heart was a cinder, that he would never love again, that the beastly, rotten game of life was over for him, and so why could n't he just *die*?

"Dear Tom," the admiral wrote, "I received your welcome letter. Thank God you're not going to hardtack and water by way of the altar. I am sending you a check. You need a change. Take a year off. Get one of your pals and go round the world. Cultivate the girls you meet—all sorts of girls. Study them. Play around. Be a gentleman. Have a good time. Don't drink.

"YOUR AFFECTIONATE GRANDFATHER.

"P.S. Try *hard* not to get married till you come back, so I can size her up for you!"